

RPG Reload File 042 – ‘Kingturn RPG’

[June 11, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where a single captured outpost can turn the tide of the battle. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the App Store's past to see how it's doing in the here and now. It's a chance to revisit some old favorites, reflect on the classics, or just to take a deeper dive on a game than our reviews typically allow for. I try to present a balanced plate of RPGs from week to week, but I'm always open to your suggestions if you think I'm missing anything. Simply comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums, or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#) with your recommendations or feedback. There are some changes coming up regarding the reader's choice articles, so if there's something you really want to see, you might want to get it in during the next month or so. You have been warned!

This week, we're taking a look at *Kingturn RPG* ([Free](#)), part of a series of tactical strategy RPGs from developer Mangobile. The series follows kind of a weird pattern in terms of its naming and chronological ordering. The first game, and the one we're looking at today, is called *Kingturn RPG*. In terms of the game's story, this is the middle chapter of the *Kingturn* trilogy. It's the third game released in this setting and story, but the first using the engine that the other two parts were eventually remade in. Are you confused yet? Maybe we should start this whole thing at the beginning, instead.

It all goes back to *Ancient Empires*, a fairly popular strategy game designed for feature phones. That game was developed and published in 2004 by MacroSPACE, one of two companies that would end up forming current

mobile big dog Glu Games. It was a fantasy-flavored clone of Nintendo's *Advance Wars*, pitting two sides against each other in a turn-based strategy game that centered around capturing and securing resources. While there were some light RPG elements to it, it was almost certainly hobbled by the time and place it was released. That didn't stop many people from enjoying it, however, and one of those people was Mangobile's founder Niels Baumann. While taking a sabbatical year in Malaysia in 2009, he passed the time on bus trips playing *Ancient Empires*. He played it enough to notice quite a few flaws in the game's artificial intelligence, and was frustrated by occasional crashes. Being from an IT background, he got to wondering if he might be able to do better.

Nine months later, Baumann had created a Java ME strategy RPG called *Swords & Earrings – Tales Of Andaria*. It was a one-man show, with the sort of graphics and music that proved it. Instead of publishing it to Java ME platforms, however, he decided to release the game on smartphones. Android came first due to its Java-friendly nature, with an iOS release following in December of 2010. The game made use of a proprietary engine, with controls that, well, looked like they were designed for a feature phone. Those controls would be replaced with a more touch-friendly set in a later update, but I fear they didn't make a good first impression with some players. It must have connected well enough with some of them, though, because Mangobile was soon hard at work on a follow-up. In talking with Baumann in preparation for this article, he humorously mentions that he had never intended to become a game developer, and if he had known it was going to be for the long haul, he'd have chosen a better name than Mangobile. I don't know, I think it's easy to remember and stands out, at least.

The follow-up, *Knightturn*, came the next year. It used the same engine as the first game, extending the gameplay and serving as a prequel for the events of the first game. It also must have done well for itself, because Mangobile then decided to release a third game that would bridge the story gap

between *Swords & Earrings* and *Knighturn*. Baumann decided it was time for a new engine, and ended up porting everything over to Unity for the third game, titled *Kingturn RPG*. That game was released in April of 2013, and it proved to be a serious improvement over the other two games in the series. It was such a big improvement, in fact, that Baumann decided to redo the other two games in the new engine. *Swords & Earrings* became the oddly-titled *Kingturn Plus* [\(Free\)](#), and *Knighturn* became *Kingturn Underworld* [\(Free\)](#). By the time 2013 wrapped, the whole series was available with all of the latest improvements that came with *Kingturn RPG*. That's not where it ended, but it's where I'm going to stop for now so that we can talk about the actual game for a bit.

At first glance, *Kingturn RPG* is a rather plain-looking, run-of-the-mill, turn-based strategy RPG. You field an ever-increasing roster of characters in mission after mission, leveling them up, and stocking them with better gear so that they're able to handle the challenges ahead. In between maps, you get a little story snippet for context, but apart from that, it's just moving pieces around on a grid. Move your character next to an enemy, choose an attack or special skill, and so on. Its best qualities are not immediately apparent, and I certainly can't blame anyone for not sticking with a game that takes a while to show its beauty. If you enjoy a good strategy game, though, I encourage you strongly to grit your teeth as hard as you must to stick it out with this series.

So what *is* the beauty of *Kingturn*? Well, we need only look at the genesis of Mangobile's first game. Remember, Baumann wasn't satisfied with the computer's intelligence in *Ancient Empires*. It's certainly no surprise, then, that the strongest element of the *Kingturn* series is its crafty AI. It's extremely clever, and it behaves in ways you would expect a human player to. If you're not careful, it will suck you into traps as often as you catch it, and its generally hard-to-predict nature makes every map a satisfying struggle. Best of all, you can select from several difficulty levels, so even players new to the genre can get an appropriate challenge. The other thing that makes

the game stand out is tied up in the strong AI. While most strategy RPGs have you trying to wipe out the enemy by simply depleting every opposing unit's HP, *Kingturn* more or less forces you to sweep the map one strategic location at a time.

While you may have a large roster of characters, each mission strictly limits how many you can field at once. Any characters who fall in battle can't be used again for a number of turns, but you can shuffle someone else out of the tent to take their place. The thing is, if you're evenly matched with the enemy or, worse, outnumbered, you're going to have a real fight ahead of you. If only you could somehow eke out a numeric advantage, you might be able to tip the scales. Of course, you can do just that in these games. The key to winning in the *Kingturn* series is to break your battle down to smaller skirmishes. Each enemy outpost or barracks you secure will allow you to field another fighter and your enemy to be able to field one fewer. If you can capture all of them along the way, the last part of the mission is more of a shove than anything.

Now, the enemy isn't stupid. It's not going to let you just march in and take a valuable square from it. If any of your characters get within sniffing range, the AI will usually park a unit on top of it. And just like you, if the enemy loses a character in battle, they can immediately field another one on their next turn. You have to press and capture in one turn, being careful not to kill any enemies you don't need to so that fresh ones won't spawn as you're trying to take the base.

This gives the game a rather unusual tempo for a strategy RPG. I'm kind of embarrassed to admit that I didn't notice the *Advance Wars* influence until Baumann mentioned *Ancient Empires*, because it unfolds a bit like the matches in that game. Ultimately, your units are your resources in this game, and whoever can gain the advantage in securing the majority of resources has a far better chance of winning. It certainly makes *Kingturn* feel like a unique experience when compared to other strategy RPGs. In most games

of this type, you're better off ganging up on a foe until they're defeated, then moving on to the next. Here, you'll want to wound everyone just a bit until you can make a serious grab, then mop up whoever's remaining. With the strong AI in play, you'll have to fight for every inch, and that's a real thrill and a half.

If you get into *Kingturn*, you'll also end up discovering its final strength. The game is positively massive in terms of mission count. Most major console strategy RPGs settle for around 25 to 35 missions. Some other mobile strategy RPGs have less than 10 missions. *Kingturn RPG* has 67 missions in its main campaign, along with a skirmish campaign containing another 20 or so missions. It's a huge number, and it allows the game to take its time telling its story and parcel out new characters and abilities at a slow, steady rate. You'll be learning new strategies tens of hours into the game, keeping it from getting too repetitive over its more than 30 hours of gameplay time. While it may not be a looker, *Kingturn* is probably one of the more all-around substantial strategy RPGs you can find. I found it immensely satisfying to replay, and I haven't even touched the highest difficulty setting and/or the perma-knockout option. Perhaps next time.

You've probably already figured this out, but Mangobile isn't the sort of developer that likes to leave the past alone. As each new game releases, the developer seems to go back and bring any new advancements to the older games. It happened again somewhat recently, in fact. Late last year, Mangobile released its latest game, *Tactics Maiden* ([Free](#)). The gameplay was largely similar to the *Kingturn* games, with a few little twists, but the game made major strides in its UI and visuals. After releasing that game, Mangobile went back to the *Kingturn* games and added higher resolution graphics and fonts, improved animations for certain skills and attacks, a new overworld map, a couple of highly-appreciated tweaks to the user interface, and Dropbox support for save files. Basically, I don't think we have to worry about *Kingturn RPG* being abandoned anytime soon.

Kingturn RPG is simply a great mobile strategy game. It's well-designed for one-handed play, offers a ridiculously large amount of content portioned into small servings, and offers a fun challenge to players of a variety of levels. Better still, it manages to have a feel all its own, no mean feat in a genre that tends to slavishly worship certain templates. Though I slightly prefer *Tactics Maiden*, Mangobite's efforts to keep its games current have paid dividends. You could tell me that *Kingturn RPG* came out last week and I wouldn't think there was any funny business about it. Not bad for a game whose origins lie in feature phones, I'd say.

That's just my take on *Kingturn RPG*, though. What do you think? Please leave your thoughts in the comments below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). I should also mention that we're going to be answering listener questions on the next **RPG Reload Podcast**, so if you have anything you'd like to ask me and Eric, send those questions via the usual routes or [by email](#). Don't forget to mark them for the podcast, or else I'll probably just answer them directly. As for me, I'll be back next week with another classic RPG. Thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *How many times can the end of the world come, anyway?*